



What is a Public-Private Partnership?

Public-private partnerships have become an important vehicle for drawing together the resources and know-how that are needed to expand and improve child care in the United States. Partnerships are formed when citizens and organizations join together to improve quality, increase supply, and/or improve the accessibility of child care in a state or community.

What is a Public-Private Partnership?

A public-private partnership exists when the public sector—federal, state, local and/or tribal officials or agencies—joins with the private sector—families, employers, philanthropies, media, civic groups, and/or service providers—to attain a shared goal.

Characteristics

Although each partnership is unique, they typically share some common characteristics.

- They bring together public- and private-sector partners.
- Partners work together toward shared goals or objectives.
- Each partner contributes time, money, expertise, and/or other resources.
- Decision-making and management responsibilities are shared among the partners.

Principles for Success

Successful partnerships follow similar principles that guide and support their activities. These principles are relevant to a variety of initiatives.

- **Have clear goals.** Partnerships should define goals at the outset in order to ensure clarity among partners, achieve desired results, and help guide the partnership through obstacles and challenges.
- **Aim to achieve positive results and regularly measure progress.** Regularly measuring results allows partnerships to assess whether activities and strategies are meeting goals, and what changes should be made to make partnership efforts more effective.
- **Involve families and account for their needs and preferences when developing programs and services.** Families are the ultimate consumers of child care. For services to be successful, they must address families' needs and be culturally and linguistically appropriate. This requires that families be involved in both designing and evaluating partnership programs.
- **Be broad-based and include key stakeholders from the beginning.** Partnerships are most effective when they are able to draw from a broad

range of perspectives, resources, and expertise. Partnerships can gain broader public and private support for their efforts through the constituencies that each partner represents and supports.

- **Involve powerful champions who make the partnership goals visible to the public.** Success requires leaders in all sectors who act as change agents by clearly communicating the goals of the partnership and building a broad base of support for it.
- **Establish clear governance structures that define partner roles and responsibilities.** Establishing an effective governance structure is essential to successful partnership management. It is equally important to define the various roles that partners will play and to make sure that all the partners understand and accept these roles.
- **Set and adhere to ground rules that guide the partnership in its work.** Partnerships should begin with mutually agreed-upon ground rules. Such ground rules might include how partners will define and measure success, conduct meetings, communicate with each other, share information, and make decisions.
- **Be flexible, adopt an entrepreneurial mindset, and adapt to changing conditions and resources.** Partnerships must be able to change in response to emerging needs and to take advantage of new opportunities.
- **Enable all partners to benefit by drawing on their strengths and contributions.** Each partner brings different strengths, knowledge, and resources to the partnership. Sensitivity to these attributes will cement working relationships among partners and allow the partnership to draw on a broad range of resources and expertise.
- **Work to maintain momentum and sustain the efforts over time.** The most successful partnerships plan right from the beginning for how they will maintain momentum and sustain their efforts. Planning for financial sustainability, celebrating successes, and creating a sense of shared ownership and collective purpose increase the likelihood that partners will stay involved over the long run.

This information was developed as part of the Child Care Partnership Project, a multi-year technical assistance effort funded by the Child Care Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Partnership Project is providing a series of technical assistance resources and materials to support the development and strengthening of public-private partnerships to improve the quality and supply of child care. All of the materials produced under the Child Care Partnership Project will be available through the National Child Care Information Center at <http://nccic.org/ccpartnerships> or by phone at 1-(800) 616-2242. For more information on the project, please contact The Finance Project at (202) 628-4200.